

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder —a Public Health Perspective

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurobehavioral disorder that may affect nearly four million school-aged children and can last into adulthood. (Source: NHIS, 2001.)

- ADHD manifests as an unusually high and chronic level of inattention, impulsivity/hyperactivity, or both. If untreated, a person with ADHD will struggle with impairments in crucial areas of life, including relationships with peers and family members, and performance at school or work. Increases in unintentional injuries and health care utilization have been noted in some studies of people with ADHD.
- As many as half of children with ADHD also have other behavior disorders. Some studies have demonstrated increases in substance abuse, risk-taking, and criminal behaviors among adolescents and adults who have ADHD and these other disorders.
- The 2000 American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic & Statistical Manual-IV-TR estimates that 3%-7% of children suffer from ADHD, and some studies have estimated higher prevalence rates in community samples. The cause(s) and risk factors contributing to ADHD are unknown, although it seems to be more prevalent among boys than girls.
- During the past decade, consumption of ADHD medications increased dramatically; however, more research is necessary to understand such changes in treatment patterns across the U.S.



ADHD can be managed through medical and psychosocial interventions.

Research indicates that medications in combination with behavioral interventions provide the best treatment for ADHD in children. (Source: MTA study findings.) However, information on the long-term effects of treatments is lacking, as is knowledge of the effects of long-term use of ADHD medications in children. Ongoing, systematic monitoring of ADHD, comorbidities, and treatment modalities is needed.

CDC acknowledges the need for further research in ADHD. Specifically, key public health questions yet to be answered include:

- What are the causes and risk factors for ADHD? What is the prevalence of ADHD? Is the prevalence increasing?
- What social and economic impacts does ADHD have on families; schools; the workforce; and judicial and health systems?
- Are ADHD and its comorbidities being appropriately diagnosed and treated?
- Are people with ADHD able to access appropriate and timely treatment?
- How effective are current interventions? What are the long-term effects of ADHD treatments in community settings?